

Vegetation of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts of Karnataka, India



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Vegetational and floristic studies have gained increased importance and relevance in recent years in view of the present need for a thorough, up-to-date assessment of the natural resources of our country. The need for conservation and balanced exploitation of the nation's plant wealth has also been keenly felt. In this context, intensive exploration of limited areas for obtaining an inventory of the floristic elements present and identification of the potential sources of the economic importance have become imperative. Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts (erstwhile South Kanara district) in the State of Karnataka are among the floristically rich regions which need such intensive field studies. The flora of these two districts is under-explored. Reference to earlier literature revealed that the previous work on plants of these two districts was that of Arora, R.K., B.M. Wadhwa and M.B. Raizada (1981). They have listed only about 50% of flowering plants available in these two districts.

The flora of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi is interesting and varied because of the wide physiographic differences prevailing in these districts, stretching from the coastal belt to the mountain ranges of the Western Ghats. The important vegetation types are coastal and mangroves, scrub forests, moist deciduous or semi-evergreen forests, and evergreen forests.

With a view to prepare the Flora of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts, a series of survey have been undertaken by the author. In the area of the present study, there are about 1350 species of flowering plants belonging to 775 genera and 144 families. Of the 1720 species of flowering plants endemic to the Western Ghats, 213 species occur in Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts.

The forests of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi districts are rich in medicinal plants. Of the 500 commonly used medicinal plants listed by Arya Vaidya Sala (1993-96), 320 species are available in these two districts. Some medicinal plants have become endangered due to over exploitation and denudation of habitats.